



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Statement at the 14th OSCE Ministerial Council

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Ministerial Council, Brussels
December 5, 2006

Mr. Minister,

We would like to express our sincere and deep appreciation to the Belgian government for its work over the past year. Being Chairman in Office can often be difficult. He or she has to juggle the competing interests of a very diverse and vocal group of participating States and somehow reach consensus.

Mr. Minister, you have made incredible efforts throughout the year on behalf of the OSCE. The United States thanks you and your extraordinarily able, flexible and responsive team for your work. You should be extremely proud of what has been achieved: you helped calm a very tense environment between two OSCE neighbors, and this Ministerial will adopt important decisions on many issues, including the framework agreement on improving the effectiveness of the OSCE, which culminates the reform discussions launched at Ljubljana. We have reached agreements on organized crime and counter-terrorism, on energy security and countering the use of the internet for terrorist purposes. We have reached agreement on the need to fight intolerance and discrimination, on combating sexual exploitation of children and trafficking in human beings – the latter two unquestionably reprehensible crimes. Importantly, we agreed to convene the High Level Conference in Bucharest next year on Combating Discrimination following up on the Cordoba Conference on Anti-Semitism, and recognized the important work being done by the Three Personal Representatives on Tolerance.

In the political-military arena, we welcome the Ministers' endorsement of efforts to implement UNSCR 1540, which will keep Weapons of Mass Destruction from the hands of terrorists. It will moreover provide support for destruction of excess Small Arms and Light Weapons and conventional ammunition, which endanger civilians and can be used by terrorists and other criminals.

Still, this Ministerial has had its share of disappointments. The ongoing conflicts in Georgia and Moldova are key examples where the OSCE can and should make a difference. But in a consensus-based organization, one nation can block the efforts of many to make progress. We regret deeply the failure of this Ministerial meeting to agree on steps to inspire confidence and energize negotiations on settlement of these conflicts.

We came to Brussels hopeful that we could decide on concrete steps that would reduce tensions and put the South Ossetia conflict on track toward peaceful resolution. Our proposals were practical and constructive, and nearly every delegation supported them.

We hope still to reach agreement soon to increase the number of OSCE monitors in South Ossetia and to secure Georgia's border at the Roki Tunnel, as we work to build confidence and improve the lives of ordinary people. We hope the year ahead will bring unity among all members of the OSCE, that support for separatism is a strategy for failure, and that we must work together to implement tangible measures to ease tensions, strengthen peace and resolve the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova.

Unfortunately, we again failed in key political declarations because one government would like to set aside the commitments that were made at Istanbul in 1999 with regard to Georgia and Moldova. While we welcome some progress the Russian Federation made in 2006 on fulfillment of its commitments in Georgia, we call for more significant progress in 2007 to resolve the remaining issues in Georgia, and complete Russia's military withdrawal from Moldova. The United States places the highest value on the CFE regime but we will not ratify the Adapted CFE Treaty until remaining Istanbul commitments have been fulfilled.

We are sorry that yet another year has passed with no progress on the Russian military withdrawal from Moldova. This should have been completed years ago. Resumption by Russia of its military withdrawal would send a signal to the Transnistrian authorities that they must work constructively to find a peaceful settlement of this conflict. We appreciate consultations that we've had here in Brussels on ideas for replacing the current peacekeeping force in Moldova with a multinational presence under an appropriate international mandate.

Fortunately, we can take heart that one conflict in the OSCE space seems on course for settlement. With the goodwill of Armenia and Azerbaijan and close cooperation among the United States, France, and the Russian Federation as Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, we are able to welcome a statement that records progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations. This shows what we can accomplish when we work together in accord with the values and principles of this organization. We also welcome the statement regarding the OSCE's intention to remain engaged in Kosovo.

Beyond the conflicts, we were greatly disappointed that a very small number of countries have once again blocked a decision on strengthening OSCE engagement with human rights defenders, who are increasingly under threat in some parts of the OSCE region. Making sure that they have the ability to function freely and without persecution should be one of the key objectives of this organization.

Mr. Minister,

The OSCE has gone through some difficult periods in its 31-year history. The Ministerials themselves can often be very contentious affairs, where difference of views – or differences of commitment to the organization itself – can lead to serious clashes. However, despite that, we believe this Ministerial has produced consensus on some good decisions, which should help expand and strengthen the ongoing work of the OSCE. This has turned out to be a very pleasant surprise. Despite our frustrations at times, we are in

general satisfied with the performance of the OSCE. We will, of course, continue to do what we can to support it on into the future.

Once again we extend our good wishes and great thanks to Belgium for a year of energetic and steady leadership. We anticipate with interest and enthusiasm the OSCE Ministerial meeting in Madrid next year.

Thank you, Mr. Minister.